

## Point and Shoot by AirDoodles

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**Summary:**

Lonnie gave him a gun. Joyce gave him a camera.

A look at Jonathan's love of photography.

## Point and Shoot

### Author's Note:

WARNING: verbal abuse/homophobic slurs à la Lonnie

DISCLAIMER: I don't know the first thing about guns

It's lighter than he remembers, Lonnie's old S&W model. It is a sharp, bulky, monstrous thing, and Jonathan has never liked it. He remembers seeing his father clean it from time to time, polishing the cold steel with a gentle tenderness that Lonnie never once showed his wife or sons. But as Jonathan swiped the gun from the glove compartment of his father's car, he was trying hard to push his personal sentiments aside.

"Are you *serious*?" he hears Nancy call out to him as she keeps watch. He can see her expression through the windshield, brows crinkled in a cross between shock and confusion.

"You wanna find this thing and, what?" Jonathan replies, emptying a box of cartridges into his pockets. "Take another picture? Yell at it?"

"This is a *terrible* idea," Nancy huffs as Jonathan hides the gun by tucking it behind his shirt. He likes the idea even less than Nancy, but he doesn't see what other options they have. He feels the chill of steel pressing against the small of his back, and his jaw tightens. To defeat monsters, they would need monsters.

"Do it! *Do it*, you little son of a bitch!" Lonnie spat at his ten-year-old son, who could barely see past the swollen flesh of his eye sockets

and the tears that flooded them.

"I don't wanna do it, Daddy, please," the boy begged, his words trembling with sobs. "I don't wanna do it!"

"I don't fucking *care* what you want!" Lonnie said. He grabbed the boy by the wrist and pulled him toward him. "No son of mine is going to be a little pussy, *you hear me, boy?*"

"*Please!*" young Jonathan wept. His tear-stained eyes looked to the rabbit that Lonnie had snared. It was so small and soft and innocent and Jonathan couldn't bear to kill it. It didn't deserve to die just for being small and soft.

Jonathan's birthday always came during cottontail season in Indiana, and the year he was to turn ten, Lonnie decided it he was old enough to go hunting with him and the boys.

"You're getting good at making breakfast," Lonnie said one morning when Jonathan was busy toasting bread for the both of them. At the time, the ten-year-old took it as a compliment, but when Lonnie finished lighting a cigarette, he scoffed. "You spend too much time with your mom. That shit'll make you go soft. That shit'll turn you into fag."

That conversation had been part of the reason Lonnie took his son hunting on his birthday.

"You're a man, Jonathan, and men are hunters," Lonnie told him earlier that day as they stalked through the woods with the rest of Lonnie's hunting gang. "Stick with us, we'll make you tough."

By the time Jonathan was nine, he hadn't yet learned to hate his father. Every time Lonnie threw something at him or called him names or shouted at him or his brother, he would try to rationalize the man's actions. He was *tired* from work, Jonathan would tell himself, or perhaps he really *shouldn't* have been playing in the living room at that time or that shirt he was wearing *was* a bit dirty. The child in him couldn't bear the guilt of hating one of his parents. So when Lonnie took him hunting on his birthday, there was still a part of the child Jonathan that craved Lonnie's love. Craved it more than

anything. Nothing he'd done before had ever caught his father's approval. But maybe today he would.

That all ended when Jonathan realized they were hunting cottontails. That morning, in the woods, when Lonnie aimed his rifle at a fluffy, unassuming rabbit, Jonathan felt his heart get stuck in his throat. He grabbed at Lonnie's arm just as he squeezed the trigger. His focus interrupted, however, Lonnie's prey ran from him. Furious at missing his mark and humiliated in front of the hunting party, Lonnie turned his rage on his son.

"Please, Daddy, I don't want to do this, please don't—," he was sobbing.

"Shut up!" Lonnie shouted. "I'm your father, you do as I say! I told your mother you were turning into a little pussy. We're making you into a *man* today! *Now go on! Shoot it!*"

Lonnie reached into his hunting bag and pulled out a Smith & Wesson revolver. For the briefest of moments, Jonathan paled, thinking that the bullets were meant for him. When Lonnie stalked toward his son, Jonathan nearly fell of his legs, screaming "No! No!" But the man took his son's small hands and pressed the handle into his sweaty palms. Then, he dragged the boy to stand in front of the snared rabbit and pointed at it.

"There!" Lonnie said, his face flush with heat and anger. "Just point and shoot! Shoot it!"

The boy could barely even breathe between sobs. The gun was as heavy as an anchor in his hands. Lonnie was yelling into his ear, telling him to "Kill it! Shoot it! Squeeze the trigger!" Jonathan shook his head. Lonnie, finally tired of his son's disobedience, came up behind the boy and wrapped his own hands around Jonathan's grip on the revolver.

"Fine, then," he hissed. He forced Jonathan to hold the gun up. Forced him to stand in front of the rabbit and stare down the barrel at the innocent target. Jonathan was shouting "No! No!" again. But Lonnie wasn't hearing him. He forced Jonathan's finger to squeeze the trigger.

The gunshot echoed through the woods and turned into a dull ringing in his ears. The recoil was strong enough to force Jonathan back against his father's chest, but Lonnie abruptly stood and let his boy fall to the ground, tears mixing with dirt. Lonnie was laughing, hooting, while Jonathan lay on the ground, mortified. When he looked back at the cottontail he shot, it didn't even look like a rabbit anymore. It just looked like a furry, bloody nothing. The heat from the rabbit's body was evaporating in the cold January air, and Jonathan was too paralyzed to even cry anymore.

Though not in the way Lonnie intended, Jonathan thinks of that day as the day he started to grow up. The day he realized that monsters were real, and one was living in their house. The guilt finally fled from him, and Jonathan began to unapologetically hate Lonnie and hate guns.

"You never said what I was saying," Nancy says out of the blue as they are walking through the woods. Jonathan sighs quietly. He had wished that she'd forgotten about it. He'd already apologized, he wanted her to just drop the subject.

"What?" he says, feigning ignorance. She turns to him with an expectant look.

"Yesterday," she says. "You said I was saying something and that's what you took my picture."

"Oh, uh. I don't know," he says. Jonathan looks down at his feet. A habit of his. But when he looks back at Nancy, she doesn't look convinced at all. He's still getting used to her being around. Getting used to having anyone around other than Will or Joyce. Before Will's disappearance, he was perfectly content being invisible, watching the

rest of the world through the lens of his camera. He was a loner by choice; this way, he never had to explain himself to anyone. People seldom ever understood him anyway, so why try?

But in the split-seconds between Nancy's question and his eventual answer, Jonathan supposes that Nancy isn't a complete stranger. Their brothers have been friends going on five years now. They're in this together, he thinks. Maybe it isn't such a risk to let her into his thoughts just this once.

"My guess is..." Jonathan begins, trying to choose his words carefully. His memory travels back to that moment when he stood in the darkness, pointed his camera at Steve Harrington and his friends and took those shots. He had been planning on leaving them and returning to his search for Will, but then Nancy had walked into his shot and changed the way he saw the scene.

"I saw this girl, you know," Jonathan says. "Trying to be someone else."

He remembers Nancy standing by the pool. She had never been an outsider the way Jonathan was, but she had never been a member of the cool crowd until Steve looked her way.

"But for that moment," he continues. "It was like you were alone or you thought you were. And you could... just be yourself."

There is a beat of silence after the last word passes Jonathan's mouth. He watches her face for a reaction. But when her lips part and she finally speaks up, she doesn't say what he was expecting her to say, whatever that may have been.

"That is such *bullshit*," Nancy says, walking ahead of him.

"W-What?" Jonathan says, and the word is partially a scoff.

"I am *not* trying to be someone else," Nancy says, turning to face him with a stern look on her face. "Just because I'm dating Steve and you don't like him—,"

"You know what? Forget it!" Jonathan says, brushing off the rest of Nancy's sentence. He walks right past her and rolls his eyes. Figures:

the one time he decides to let a stranger become privy to his thoughts and she rejects them outright.

“I just thought it was a good picture.”

Lonnie brought him straight home after the ordeal. Joyce had run out to greet them on the porch, telling them to hurry into the kitchen so Jonathan could blow out the candles on his cake. Instead, Jonathan ran into his mother's arms, still racked with sobs from earlier that day while Lonnie pushed past them and headed straight for the fridge to grab a beer, all the while muttering about how his son cried like a little girl over a dead rabbit.

“I don't wanna go hunting anymore, Mom,” the boy cried as Joyce brought him inside and cut him a slice of birthday cake.

“Don't worry, no more hunting, okay, sweetheart?” Joyce said, brushing his hair out of his eyes. “No more hunting, I promise.”

Jonathan cried for a week afterward. Joyce did what she could to come between him and Lonnie, who would always smack the boy's face and tell him to “man up” or “only fags and little girls cry as much as you do.” When Winter Break ended, Jonathan was actually happy that he wouldn't have to spend all day at home with his father.

“Will, hold still or I might end up cutting off your nose!” Joyce said to the five-year-old that she had sat down on the kitchen counter for a haircut that morning.

“Look, Mommy!” Will gurgled as he started scrunching up his nose, trying to wiggle it. “Like a bunny!”

Joyce laughed. "Yeah, I see," she said, snipping at his fringe with a pair of scissors. "That's right, like a bunny."

"Like Thumper," Will said.

Jonathan was sitting at the dining table with a piece of buttered toast, but he wasn't eating it. Lonnie was still asleep in his parents' bedroom, so he wasn't available to taunt the poor boy that morning. But Jonathan still felt his father's soul-sucking presence everywhere.

Joyce finished Will's haircut and stepped back to admire her work.

"Don't you just look sooo handsome," Joyce said, and Will smiled. "Aw, my little baby boy going back to kindergarten. Wait right there, Will, I want to take a picture. Where's that camera?"

Joyce looked around and finally spotted their old Polaroid sitting on the dining table next to Jonathan. When she walked over to retrieve it, she turned her attention back onto her still-sullen ten-year-old. She gave him a sympathetic look and placed a hand gently on his shoulder.

"Hey, big guy," Joyce said, smiling down at him. Jonathan only shrugged in reply. His mother pulled up a chair beside him and slunk down into it. Joyce brought his face close to Jonathan's and gave him a soft smile.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," she whispered. "I know you still feel bad about what happened. And that's alright, take all the time you need. Just... know that I love you so much. And even if he has a funny way of showing it, so does your dad."

Jonathan shrugged in reply. Joyce didn't know what to make of the gesture, but she hoped it was a sign that he would be okay. Jonathan finally reached for the toast and took a bite out of the corner.

"I have an idea," Joyce said, reaching for the Polaroid camera. "Why don't you take this and help me take a picture of your brother?"

"Me?" Jonathan asked.

"Yeah, come on!" Joyce said, grabbing the Polaroid from the table



and taking Jonathan's hand. "It's fun! I'll show you how, come over here. You just point and shoot."

Jonathan stood from the table and followed his mother into the kitchen. Once he was standing in front of Will, Joyce put the bulky camera into the boy's small hands. Jonathan had seen his mother use it before, but he'd never had a chance to try it himself. Joyce showed him how to position his hands, where to put his finger. Jonathan closed one eye and peered through the eye piece with the other. Through it, he could see his baby brother, Will, centered in a box-like frame, smiling and wiggling his nose like a rabbit.

"Okay, now squeeze the button there," Joyce said.

At first, the action scared Jonathan; holding the camera and pushing down on the button felt too much like holding a gun and squeezing the trigger. But Jonathan did as he was told, applying a bit of pressure to the button. There was a flash and a clicking noise that startled him a little. But when it was over, there was black, square piece of paper coming out the front of the camera. Joyce took the photo and started to shake it around.

"This is the fun part," Joyce said before handing it to Jonathan to shake. He followed his mother's actions, shaking the photo until the black started to subside and there, in the center of the the square frame, an image of a smiling Will Byers appeared. Joyce smiled, looking down at the photo.

"Oh, isn't that just so cute?" she said.

But Jonathan wasn't hearing her. Not completely. He was too busy staring at the Polaroid picture, bewitched at how Will's image was now permanently fixed on the film. He let out a breath he'd been holding just as Joyce instructed him to take another photo, this time with her in it. Jonathan lifted the camera and did as was told. Another flash and another click, and there was another photo. Jonathan shook the film until the image appeared. In the photos he took, Will and his mother would smile forever.

He took another photo of Joyce and Will, and then another one of them in the living room. He was starting to smile again, Joyce noted.

"Hey, why don't you keep it and take it with you to school?" Joyce suggested.

"I... I can?" Jonathan asked timidly.

"Of course you can!" Joyce said, spreading the Polaroids out on the table. "Wow, would you look at these? There are great, you're really good at this!"

Jonathan looked down at his own work and smiled. He took his mother's advice and took the camera with him to school, shooting more photos, as many as he could with the film still left. He decided that he liked cameras. He liked how easy they were to use. Just a little pressure on the button, a slight squeeze, and there was a moment captured. He liked that when he took a picture, nobody had to die. Instead, his photographed subjects lived forever. And the idea captivated him in a way nothing else ever did.

When Nancy walks down the stairwell and right toward him, Jonathan doesn't know how he should act. If this had been them a month ago, he'd have... well, for starters, he wouldn't be in her house on Christmas Eve in the first place. It was so much easier when it was just the two of them, hunting down monsters and shopping for bear traps. Back then, they were united under a common cause and it was easier to push aside the valley of difference between them.

But Jonathan has only stopped in the Wheeler house to pick up his little brother, and he had spied Steve Harrington in the living area on his way to fetch Will from the basement. Which means that he needs to be on his best behavior when interacting with Nancy.

"H-Hey," Jonathan says as she descends the last few steps and then hands something to him with both hands.

"Merry Christmas," she says, smiling.

Jonathan's eyes flash toward Will for a moment and then back at the package that Nancy offers to him. He accepts it with just the right amount of hesitancy to seem polite.

"Uh, thanks," he says. "I... didn't get you anything. I feel bad."

"Oh, no, uh," she says, shutting her eyes for a brief moment. "It's not really a present, it's more like a... well, you'll see."

Before he even has a chance to say "thank you" again, Nancy Wheeler leans into him and presses a soft, soft kiss against his cheek. When he looks back at her, he sees a strange look on her face, and it oddly feels as if he's looking in a mirror at his own expression. He hardly has time to decipher what it means before she smiles again and then walks away.

On the way to his car, Jonathan feels the skin on his face burning up, and he doesn't need to look down at his brother to know that Will is smirking. When Will unwraps Nancy's gift in the safety of Jonathan's car, he isn't the least bit surprised to see a brand new camera. Still, he grins contentedly and then steals a glance back at the Wheeler house, at the illuminated window that is Nancy's bedroom. Photography, for him, has always been less about the physical pictures as much as it has been about seeing life as something worth saving. So when Steve Harrington broke his camera that day, he learnt to take snapshots with his memory. So he searches through his mind's eye that vision of Nancy coming down the stairwell and looking right at him.

He had always thought of himself as the one capturing these moments; for once, the moment captures him.